

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: THAMMASAT SEMINAR ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION

SUMMARY: DR. BOONSANONG PUNYATHAYAN, DR. PRAMOT NAKHONTHAP, SAMRENG KHAMPHA-U, AND DR. KHIEH THIRAWITH DISCUSSED THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION IN A LATE AFTERNOON SEMINAR AT THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY ON 19 MARCH 1974. BY FAR THE GENERAL THRUST OF THEIR REMARKS WAS CRITICAL. IN ADDITION, BOONSANONG AND PRAMOT TRADED PERSONAL CRITICISMS WHILE KHIEH PROVIDED COMIC RELIEF AND WELL TAKEN SARCASM REGARDING THE CRITICISMS AND DISAGREEMENTS OF HIS TWO COLLEAGUES. APPROXIMATELY FIFTEEN HUNDRED STUDENTS WATCHED, LISTENED ATTENTIVELY, AND APPLAUDED FREQUENTLY THE PERFORMANCE BEFORE THEM. OUTSIDE THE THAMMASAT AUDITORIUM HAWKERS RANGING IN AGE FROM 10 TO 40 SOLD THE THOUGHTS OF MAO, LENIN, AND HO CHI MINH. THE ENTIRE EVENT WAS A CASE STUDY IN THE POLITICIZATION OF THAI UNIVERSITY
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STUDENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. BOONSANONG AND PRAMOT WERE CRITICAL OF THE CURRENT DRAFT CONSTITUTION. THEY SEE IT AS DICTATORIAL IN NATURE, OR AT LEAST EASILY MANIPULATED IN THAT DIRECTION. THEY POINTED OUT THAT IT DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY GUARANTEE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AS OUTLINED IN THE UN DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS OR THE U.S. CONSTITUTION. BOONSANONG TOOK SPECIAL ISSUE WITH THE CONSTANT REPETITION OF THE QUALIFYING PHRASE "IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW," SAYING THIS COULD RESULT IN LAWS BEING PASSED THAT WERE UN-DEMOCRATIC. PRAMOT PREFACED HIS REMARKS WITH A STATEMENT THAT THERE WERE GOOD THINGS ABOUT THE CONSTITUTION AND THAT IT WAS DEFINITELY BETTER THAN ANY PREVIOUS SUCH DOCUMENT. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE SEMINAR HE WANTED TO SPEAK TO THE DEFECTS--WHICH WERE, IN ESSENCE, THE LACK OF INVIOABLE GUARANTEES ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

2. BOONSANONG FOLLOWED PRAMOT AND IMMEDIATELY CRITICIZED HIM NOT ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS ONE OF THE 18 MEMBERS OF THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE (CDC) AND THEREFORE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS "DICTATORIAL DOCUMENT," BUT ALSO FOR NOT VOICING HIS CRITICISM OF IT MORE PUBLICLY. PRAMOT RETURNED THE CRITICISM WITH A FEW BARBS OF HIS OWN ABOUT HOW IT WAS TOO BAD BOONSANONG HAD NOT BEEN ON THE CDC. HE WONDERED ON THE OTHER HAND WHY, IF BOONSANONG WERE SO GOOD, HE WAS NOT NOMINATED TO THAT COMMITTEE OR ELECTED TO THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA). KHUEN, NOTED FOR HIS SOMETIMES UNKEMPT APPEARANCE, PROVIDED COMIC RELIEF WHEN IT CAME HIS TURN TO SPEAK BY DRAWING ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT THIS TIME HE WAS WEARING SHOES, SOCKS, A WHITE SHIRT, AND HIS HAIR WAS COMBED. HE REMINDED HIS TWO COLLEAGUES THAT NO CONSTITUTION COULD EVER BE PERFECT AND SOLVE ALL OF A NATION'S PROBLEMS. HE ADDED THAT MOST THAI DON'T UNDERSTAND DEMOCRACY ANYWAY, AND WILL NOT UNDERSTAND OR EVEN EXERCISE ALL THE RIGHTS THESE CRITICS ARE WORRIED ABOUT. FINALLY, HE SUGGESTED THAT DEMOCRACY IS WHAT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND THE PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVES MAKE IT, AND HOW THEY USE THE CONSTITUTION AS A LIVING DOCUMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TOWARD THAT END.

3. ADDING TO THE IMPACT OF THE EVENT WERE THE STREET VENDORS RANGING IN AGE FROM 10 TO 40 WHO SET UP SMALL TABLES ON THE APPROACHES TO THE THAMMASAT AUDITORIUM. THEIR COMMODITY WAS BOOS: MOST PREDOMINANTLY THE THOUGHTS OF MAO, LENIN, AND HO CHI MINH.

4. COMMENT: THE STUDENTS OBVIOUSLY ENJOYED THE VERBAL CONTEST. THEY APPLAUDED FREQUENTLY AND FEW LEFT EARLY. AN EMBASSY OFFICER WHO ATTENDED THE SESSIN CAME AWAY IMPRESED WITH THIS LESSION THAI POLITICS. THE SESSION SEEMED INCREDIBLE WHEN VIEWED AGAINST TRADITIONAL THAI POLITICAL CULTURE AND VALUES: THAI STUDENTS THEMSELVES AS PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROCESS OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE, EVEN IF ONLY BY PROVIDING A FORUM FOR PUBLIC EXCHANGE BETWEEN MEN LIKE BOONSANONG AND PRAMOT. THIS SEMINAR WAS A CASE STUDY IN THE FURTHER POLITICIZATION OF THAI STUDENTS.

KINTNER

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